

Could you briefly introduce yourself?

I was born on 08/09/1926. I grew up in Merscheid near Vianden. My name is actually Marianne. As a child, I always said when someone went away, "Maia go too!" From then on I was Maria and that's what I'm called everywhere. My maiden name is Meyer, and my present name is Klemmer. My father's name was Nic Meyer and came from Bivels. Our mother's name was Marguerite Weiler, later Meyer-Weiler, and came from Merscheid, my home village. My brother was the oldest. He was 21 when all the young men were drafted. Then came my sister, Anna Meyer, then me and then my youngest sister, Ketty Meyer. People always thought we were twins. We were only 13-14 months apart. They are all dead, only I am still alive.

How old were you when the German Wehrmacht invaded Luxembourg? Can you remember that day?

In the morning our mother came and said, "Children, get up, it's not a nice world, the 'Prussians' are here." We always called the Germans "Prussians". It was a Friday. At that time there were more church services, which we always attended. I felt sick during the service because of the war, because of the Germans. The villages were full with them. You couldn't imagine what would happen.

What specifically changed for you and your family in your everyday life as a result of the German occupation? For example, at school?

No, not much changed at school. We spoke a lot of German in the schools back then anyway. During the war, French was not allowed to be spoken. We had a cousin from Versailles who always came to visit. Through her we learned to speak French and we all were always keen to learn French.

On 30 August 1942, compulsory military service was introduced in Luxembourg. Can you remember that day?

Yes, that was a very bad day. From then on, the young men were hidden. You still have to take your hat off to these people who hid the young men at that time at the risk of their lives. People thought they could still go in the beginning, but if they really went into the Wehrmacht, where shooting would go on, they wouldn't be going back.

Did anyone in your family also have to join the Wehrmacht?

Yes, I was still young at the time. My husband was in it too. The young men of the right age all had to go.

Your brother too?

Yes, he too. He was in the neighbouring village, with a farmer. To this day, I can't thank these people enough for what they did for others at the risk of their lives.

That means they hid your brother?

Yes, but he was also hidden with the family my eldest sister married into. She married at Putscheid near Weiler.

Can you explain how you found out that you would be relocated?

We always had that in the back of our minds. We children perhaps not so. I was not really a child anymore, but an adolescent. But our parents, they figured that you would lose everything if you were relocated. Nobody knew whether there would be anything left when they came back. They had worked hard all their lives and maybe when they returned there would be nothing left. They also did it for the young men so that they could come back home. If the young men didn't go back to the war and hid, it was clear that you would be relocated. You had to be prepared for that.

Your father nevertheless still tried to place you and your sister on farms?

He had looked for these places for us in advance. I was in Bourscheid-Moulin, my sister on my uncle's farm. They thought that perhaps we could stay at home. But that was not to be contemplated.

When you were relocated, you were on the farm and your parents at home. You then all came to Hollerich together. So that's where you saw your parents again?

Yes, I was the last to find them. I cried on the way because I was afraid I wouldn't get to them in Luxembourg City. But then I did get to them all the same.

That means you all found each other again in Hollerich?

Yes, and from there we were relocated in Germany. In the direction of Silesia.

And the locality where you were there?

Wartha. That was a beautiful town with a beautiful church where our men also had a singing club. There were also women there. We Luxembourgers could hold services in the church if we wanted to. During the war, people prayed more than they do today. Today people have forgotten somewhat. At that time we had nothing else. If you prayed a little, you thought things would go better.

For how long were you relocated?

I think we were there for 22 months. I was lucky to end up with a good family. They had four daughters and I was very well looked after. When they had visitors, the wife introduced me with "This is my fifth daughter". They were good people, she just didn't get on well with her husband. He was a bit strange. He always went hoarding, but kept everything for himself.

What sort of work did you have to do when you were relocated?

In the beginning, we worked in private households. Then all of a sudden we had to dig trenches. So that the Russians would fall into the trenches with their tanks if they came. My youngest sister was there too. She had to cut branches from the trees to cover the trenches. But the Russians weren't that stupid. They didn't fall into them. We women also had to work with shovels. Mrs Mines - the camp commandant was well disposed to her - just took a bit of earth on the tip of the shovel. "Mrs Mines, wouldn't you do better to take a coffee spoon?" he then said to her. He still meant well by her. These were rich people. I think they owned copper mines.

How should one imagine where you lived when you were relocated?

In a warehouse, like here in the old peoples' home. A large building which served as a camp for us. There were many such camps in Germany.

You lived with a family there?

Yes, some were lucky, others not. My youngest sister was unlucky. She was in a real Nazi family. She often cried because she didn't fare well there.

What was the food supply like during the relocation? Did you always have enough to eat?

We received many parcels from home. But they were all opened and searched. If there was ham or things like that in it, they didn't reach us. They took those things for themselves.

Was there enough to eat or did you also have to go hungry?

We had enough, but the German food ... They didn't have much themselves, so what should they give us.

Your father was once able to go home for 3 days. Why was that?

We once got a letter that the camp commandant read before he gave it to us. He said: "If your mother is dead, I have to let you go". But we didn't tell him that it was the sister-in-law. Otherwise he wouldn't have been allowed to go home.

So he was allowed home because the camp commandant thought his mother had died.

Yes, one day for the outward journey, one day for the funeral and one day for the return journey.

Were you and your parents and siblings in the same camp in Silesia?

We were in the camp, but our father was already in another locality somewhat further away. There he had to work in a factory. He had met three older ladies there with whom he got on well and sometimes played cards. Otherwise he would have been homesick for us. When we were working in the trenches, my mother, who was not afraid of anything, once put up an umbrella when it rained. "Close that thing, it's not soldierly!" said our superior. So she had to close the umbrella and walk through the rain. Such men, who were no good for the front, had to look out for us. We always called him stupid Hans.

So there was a strict command there?

Yes, but we were still better off than the many people who were in the concentration camps.

Can you describe your own everyday life for us? You got up in the morning and then how did your day go?

In the beginning, when I was with Mrs Mandel, I didn't have to walk far to work in the shop and also sometimes in the household as a help. She was a nice woman. She didn't get on so well with her husband. He always asked me about it because he didn't understand about the relocation. But I didn't tell him anything. He didn't need to know everything.

Did you also have free time or did you always have to work?

On Rosenkranzberg there were three places with crosses where we often went for walks. We also visited chapels there. That was on Sundays. We couldn't complain because they didn't torture us. Not like those who ended up in the concentration camps. And Mrs Mandel was really nice. Once she was so eager for coffee that she asked me to go to my mother in the camp to get if only one coffee bean for her. But she wouldn't have been able to do much with that. So my mother gave her coffee so that she could make herself a pot of coffee. In return, I sometimes got something she had in the shop, such as cabbage or lettuce, which we didn't have.

You also listened to the radio in secret.

Secretly, yes. No one was allowed to know. It was the young men who listened. If anyone had known...

What did they listen to?

What was going on in the world. About the war, etc. And what was going on in Luxembourg, I think.

Did you realise during the relocation that Luxembourg was being liberated at that time?

Yes, we knew that early on. We also secretly listened to the Grand Duchess. "Dear Luxembourgers", when she spoke to us. She reported when something special happened. Many said that it would be easy for her to talk, but in retrospect we learned that she interceded in our favour. But nobody knew little Luxembourg. It was through her that people found out about it.

Did faith play an important role during the war and the relocation?

Yes. If people had not been able to pray, they would not have been able to exist. Praying gave the most comfort and hope. Things would surely get better. It could not go on like this.

Can you tell us how you were liberated?

There was huge joy in the camp. People still thought it wasn't true.

How did the Russians come? With tanks?

Yes. With all kinds of equipment. We didn't show ourselves much. We were afraid of them. Those who had committed a few dirty deeds, the real Nazis, made a quick getaway. They knew they wouldn't fare well.

That was the case with the camp commandant, wasn't it?

Yes, he used to say to us: "You shouldn't think that you will ever get home if the Russian comes. If the Russian comes, you will be put up against the wall, shot in the neck, finished." We were afraid we would never get home. As soon as the first Russians came, he went into the forest with his 10-year-old son and his wolfhound and shot first his son, then the dog, and in the end his wife and himself. That's when he discharged himself. And we were still there. We had a family with us, the parents were already elderly, and a Russian went down to the daughter at night and had already torn her pyjamas. The old parents had to watch this. They sat in the bunk beds and wept and prayed. Our mother went to help, but he immediately pointed his gun at her.

What happened when the Russians came?

It didn't happen so quickly. All those camps and the concentration camps. When we were really free, we rounded up some people, including French and British people who had also been imprisoned, and played dance music. The French were really good dancers. When we got home, the young people organised a dance evening. One of our cousins asked us how come we could waltz so well. "I thought you had been relocated. Where did you learn to dance like that?" We learned it from the French. The slow waltz and the tango. After a while, the relocated could go home. That's what people had been trying to arrange.

So this was organised from Luxembourg?

Yes.

How did this journey home turn out?

It didn't all happen at once. We stopped several times, for example in Speyer and Breslau. For a while there were no trains or anything. My eldest sister left before me and I was left alone. But then in Breslau I got a connection home.

And at home you saw your brother again?

Because he had no more horses, he came with the oxen.

Can you describe for us the moment when your parents, yourself and your siblings came together again?

We almost couldn't believe it. Our aunt had cooked a real feast with a roast and we finally got to eat something good again.

What did your house look like? Was much destroyed?

Our house was not quite as destroyed as our aunt's, but if you look at the pictures from back then, it still looked terrible. But we could still live in it. It needed a lot of work.

Did people help each other then?

Yes, people helped each other, but everyone also had to look out for themselves. In some villages it was not quite as bad when it came to the damage, but others were completely destroyed. Especially in the Éislek.